

**Theological Assumptions in the New Testament Citations of the Old Testament:
Hebrews 1 As a Test Case**

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In the first chapter of the epistle to the Hebrews, the author cites a series of seven Old Testament passages (vv. 5-13) to support his teachings about the deity of Jesus and his supremacy over the angels (vv. 1-4).

Many interpreters have accused the author of Hebrews of taking interpretive liberties in understanding these passages as a reference to Jesus. Since on the surface many of these passages do not appear to be messianic in their original setting, the author appears to be reading things into the OT passages. For example, Buchanan says concerning this passage, "Like other scholars of his time, the author was also capable of taking an Old Testament passage out of context and attributing it to the Messiah."¹ Others claim that the author uses an allegorical method of interpretation, similar to the Jewish Alexandrian approach used by Philo.² This allegorical exegesis sees a hidden spiritual meaning in the text that is not consistent with the literal meaning.

When examining the use of OT passages in the NT, we should not assume that modern interpretive methods and assumptions are used. The biblical authors must be understood in their own cultural context, which includes a comparison to early Jewish interpretations of the same passages. Yet it also should not be assumed, as is done by many modern writers, that the interpretive methods of the biblical writers are totally alien or that their exegesis is forced. It is important to study each passage inductively to determine the interpretive techniques and assumptions that the NT authors actually used. A close examination of the assumptions and interpretive methods of Hebrews 1 shows that it is not unreasonable for the author to use these OT passages to support his claims about Christ in light of his assumptions and purposes.

There are several major reasons why the use of the passages cited in Heb. 1 to support the deity of Christ may seem strange to modern eyes: (1) The discussion is terse and does not include all steps of the argument. Since a step is sometimes omitted in a logical syllogism, it may falsely appear that the author is jumping to a conclusion. (2) Unstated theological assumptions play a part in the interpretation of some of these verses. These assumptions may be the missing step in the implicit syllogism or they may determine the interpretive method used to understand the OT passage. (3) The purpose of citing some passages is not apologetic but theological. In these cases the passages are not a proof of a proposition to the unconvinced, but theological and practical teachings for those who share basic Christian convictions.

The Interpretation of Biblical Citations in Hebrews 1

Hebrews 1 begins with a profound description of the supremacy and deity of Jesus Christ (vv. 1-4), followed by seven OT citations that support these claims (vv. 5-13).

The author begins by asserting that Jesus is (1) the Son through whom God has spoken to humanity in the last days (v. 2a); (2) the one whom God appointed heir of all things (v. 2b); (3) the one through whom God made the created order (v. 2c); (4) the radiance of God's glory (v. 3a); (5) the exact representation of God's nature (v. 3b); (6) the one who sustains all creation by his powerful word (v. 3c); (7) the one who provided purification for human sins (v. 3d); and, (8) the one who now sits at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven (v. 3e). In light of

¹George Wesley Buchanan, *To the Hebrews. Translation, Comment and Conclusions*, The Anchor Bible, ed. William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1972), 22. He is speaking about Heb. 1:10-12.

²Sidney Sowers, *The Hermeneutics of Philo and Hebrews. A Comparison of the Interpretation of the Old Testament in Philo Judeaus and the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Richmond, VA: John Knox, 1965), 66; James Moffatt, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1924), xlvi; C. Spicq, *L'Épître aux Hébreux* (Paris: Gabalda, 1952), 1:39-91. Spicq later modified his view (cf. C. Spicq, "L'Épître aux Hébreux, Apollons, Jean-Baptiste, les Hellenistes et Qumran," *Review Qumran 1* (1959): 365-90).

these exalted attributes and works of Christ, the writer says that Jesus is far superior to the angels (v. 4).

Table 1: Old Testament Passages Cited in Hebrews 1

#	Hebrews	OT Passage	Theme
1	v. 5a	Ps. 2:7	The relationship of the Davidic king to God as son
2	v5b	2 Sam 7:14	The relationship of the Davidic king to God as son
3	v. 6	Ps 97:7 or Deut 32:43 LXX	Angels worship God the Son
4	v. 7	Ps 104:4	The changeable nature of angels
5	v. 8-9	Ps 45:6-7	The eternal throne and exaltation of the Son
6	v. 10-12	Ps 102:25-27	The eternal, unchangeable nature of God, the creator
7	v. 13	Ps 110:1	The Son sits at God's right hand

Citations 1 (v. 5a = Ps. 2:7) and 2 (v. 5b = 2 Sam. 7:14): The Relationship of the Davidic King to God as Son

The first citation is a quotation of Ps. 2:7. In this royal psalm, the Davidic king was to be in a special relationship with God, which is shown by the fact that God addresses the king as “son” and the king can address God as “father”. The idea of “son” in the psalm connotes a special intimacy and close relationship with God, special privileges and honor. It also suggests that the king was to be the heir of God’s blessings (cf. Heb. 1:2).

The second citation is a quotation of 2 Sam. 7:14, which is part of the covenant that God made with David promising that his descendants would rule forever. The immediate reference is to Solomon who would build the temple and reign after David died.³ Yet in many ways the promise is too big to be fulfilled only by Solomon, since the kingdom would last forever (v. 13 and twice in v. 16).

By the NT era, 2 Sam. 7:11-16 was interpreted messianically in some Jewish circles, including at Qumran (e.g. 4QFlor 10:11, 18-19).⁴ Various Second Temple Jewish writings (e.g. Pss. Sol. 17-18),⁵ along with Jn. 7:42 and Mk. 12:35 show that there was a popular expectation among many Jews that the Messiah would be descended from David.

The author of Hebrews links the citations of Ps. 2:7 and 2 Sam. 7:14 closely together. The testimonia collection of 4QFlor also associates these verses in a section on “the Last Days.” The juxtaposition of the two passages creates a chiasm with son and father (“begotten”), then father and son.⁶

Longenecker believes that the two citations are linked based on the common rabbinic practice of linking citations by keywords.⁷ The relationship of the citations, however, is much deeper than simply the presence of the

³Parts of the promise related directly to Solomon, such as the fact that he would build the temple (v. 13) and the promise to punish him when he does wrong (v. 14b).

⁴In 4QFlor the “son” in 2 Sam. 7:14 is identified as “the Scion of David who will function in Zion in the Last Days.”

⁵For a discussion of the evidence in Testaments of XII Patriarchs, cf. D. S. Russell, *The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic. 200 BC - AD 100* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1964), 316-9.

⁶William L. Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, Word Biblical Commentary, no. 47A (Dallas: Word, 1991), 25.

⁷Richard N. Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period* (Grand Rapids, Mi.: Eerdmans, 1975), 177. The rabbis called this interpretive rule *gezerah shawah* (p. 34).

word “son.” There is an intrinsic conceptual link between Ps. 2:7 and 2 Sam. 7:14 in several ways: (1) Both describe the king of Israel as God’s “son.” (2) Psalm 2 echos the language and expands upon the promise of 2 Sam. 7:11-17. The “decree” in which God spoke of the king as his “son” probably refers to the revelation God gave through Nathan in 2 Sam. 7:11-16. Ps. 2 explains that the king would be God’s vice-gerent, ruling on his behalf over all the nations of the earth, not simply over Israel. (3) Both passages also describe an idealized conception of the king that was never fulfilled by any human king. The passage has eschatological overtones in terms of judgment, universal rule of the king over all nations, the rebellion of the nations against God, and the rule of God through this idealized figure. Indeed the description of the king was *too big* to be fulfilled by any human king and thus these verses leave open the question of who would meet all the expectations of this idealized image. In time the concept grew that the Messiah would be the greatest descendant of David and therefore God’s “son” to the fullest extent. Only the Messiah could fulfill the idealized aspects of the descriptions of the Davidic king. Through the concept of corporate solidarity, the Messiah sums up all that the perfect Davidic king was to be.

Although this Jewish background shows that these verses might reasonable be interpreted messianically, it is the Christian heritage of the author of Hebrews that accounts for the identification of this figure with Jesus. The synoptic Gospels report that both at the baptism (Mk. 1:11 par) and transfiguration of Jesus (Mk. 9:3 par) a divine voice spoke from heaven (a *bath qol*) identifying Jesus as God’s Son in language that echos Ps. 2:7 and 2 Sam. 7:14: “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased” (Mk. 1:11) and “This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to Him!” (Mk. 9:3). This may be why the author of Hebrews introduces the passage with, “concerning which of the angels did God say . . . ,” since God did indeed speak from heaven and identify Jesus as his Son at the baptism and transfiguration of Jesus. These dramatic experiences of the apostles profoundly shaped the early Christian conception of the identity of Jesus as the Son of God and provided a divine confirmation of his messianic mission.⁸ Thus the author of Hebrews works from a revelational assumption that Jesus is Messiah and Son of God, which is rooted in these seminal apostolic experiences.

On one level the Messiah fulfills the conceptions of the king in these passages because he is a descendant of David. The promises of the Davidic covenant and the expectations for the king apply to him as well as to any Davidic king. Yet at a deeper level only the Messiah perfectly fulfills all the expectations of the idealized Davidic king and the perfect Son, since only the Messiah could achieve the universal scale of the rule of the king as God’s vice-gerent. The description is inherently eschatological both in terms of the rebellion of the nations and the universal rule of the king and thus suggests the expectation of an eschatological figure who will fulfill these concepts more fully than any other king. The interpretation of Ps. 2 and 2 Sam. 7:14 as references to the Messiah, then, depends on two interpretive methods: (1) The Jewish concept of *corporate solidarity* says that the Messiah sums up all the idealized expectations of the Davidic king. (2) All the kings of Israel serve as *types* of the Messiah. Typology means that these kings set an historical pattern that points forward to the eschatological king, who fulfills more perfectly everything they were aiming to be.

Citation 3 (v. 6 = Ps. 97 (LXX 96):7 or Deut. 32:43 LXX): Angels Worship God the Son

The third citation comes from either Ps. 97:7 (96:7 LXX) or Deut. 32:43 LXX (the Song of Moses).⁹ In either case the passage stresses that only the Lord God should be worshiped. Deut. 32 says that “there is no God but me” (v. 39) and God will bring judgment on people for their idolatry and unrighteousness (vv. 36-42). Ps. 97 stresses that false gods (idols in the MT, angels in the LXX) should worship the one true God. In both passages, the contrast between false gods and the true God is in view in the context, which fits the usage in Hebrews. The

⁸Cf. 2 Pet 1:16-18, which also refers to the transfiguration as a confirmatory event of Jesus identify and God’s blessing on his ministry.

⁹Hebrews uses exactly the same wording as Deut. 32:43 in the LXX, although the MT omits this clause. The clause is also found in a Hebrew MS at Qumran, although the Hebrew reads “Sons of God..” Virtually the same exhortation is found in Ps. 97(96):7 (“worship him, all you his angels”). If the citation is from Ps. 95:7 the change from a second person command to a third person command (“let all the angels of God worship him”) may be simply a slight paraphrase to fit the flow of Heb. 1.

recipients of the letter wanted to exalt angels to a place of special honor, but Scripture says that even angels worship God and one should not worship any God but the Lord. The irony is especially strong in Ps. 97:7 that what people perceive as gods ultimately will bow down to the true God. If this context is assumed in Hebrews, the message is particularly relevant to their situation.

The author of Hebrews claims that Jesus is the one true God who alone must be worshiped. Although in Ps. 2:7 and 2 Sam. 7:14 “son” could be understood as an honorific title that all Israelite kings enjoyed, in Heb. 1:6 Jesus is “God” in the highest sense. In light of the stress in both OT passages that only the one true God should be worshiped, it is unthinkable that the author would urge them to worship of any one less than the true God.

The early church saw eschatological significance in Deut. 32, in terms of God’s work of deliverance and judgment. It is quoted several times in the NT (Rom. 10:19 (v. 21); 12:19 (v. 35); 15:10 (v. 43); Heb. 10:30 (v. 35); Rev. 15:3-4 (v. 4)).¹⁰ Although Deut. 32 is not explicitly messianic, it is consistent with the eschatological work of the Messiah. Frequently in Jewish Second Temple literature there is an ambivalence about the eschatological work of God, which is sometimes attributed to God directly and sometimes to God working through the Messiah. Both concepts can even appear in the same book (e.g. Jub; 1 Enoch). The assumption that the messianic work was also the work of God may be part of the reason the author of Hebrews can transfer the worship of God to the worship of Jesus in this passage.

Nevertheless, this citation does not *prove* the deity of the Son. The author *assumes* that Jesus is fully divine, a point he has stressed strongly in vv. 2-3. The deity of Christ is a *revelational assumption*, not a proposition demonstrated by an OT proof text. The author uses this citation to explore an important implication of the fact that Jesus is truly God: If Jesus is fully God, then he should be worshiped.

Citation 4 (v. 7 = Ps. 104:4 (LXX 103:4)): The Changeable Nature of Angels

The fourth citation, taken from Ps. 104:4, describes the nature of angels. (1) The passage teaches that angels are created beings (“*he makes his angels*”). (2) Angels are also changeable. God made them “winds,” which suggests that their nature is intangible spirit.¹¹ Some times they appear as “flames of fire,” which may refer to their appearance in shining glory when they appear before people. They appear in either of these forms according to the will of God. (3) Finally, the passage says that angels are God’s servants.

Hebrews uses this citation in the context of other passages about the Son to show the inferiority of angels to Christ. The angels are created beings, but (δὲ) the Son is uncreated (v. 8) and, in fact, he created everything (v. 10). The angels are changeable, but the Son rules forever (v. 8) and remains the same forever (v. 12). Angels are servants, but the Son is an eternal ruler (v. 8). This citation supports why the Son should be worshiped, rather than angels. The emphasis on worshiping God rather than angels is consistent with the OT context, which is a psalm of praise to the God of glory who created and cares for all of his creation. The additional step taken by the author of Hebrews is to say that the divine Son should also be worshiped, which follows naturally if the Son is indeed God.

The interpretation of Ps. 104:4 is consistent with its meaning in the original context and recognizes the figurative language used in the poetry. Yet when combined with other citations, the author draws inferences that go beyond the teachings of the original passage. These inferences, however, are not unreasonable. They constitute

¹⁰Deut. 32 is also alluded to in Rom. 11:11; 1 Cor. 10:20, 22; Phil. 2:25; Lk. 21:22; Rev. 6:10; 10:5; 18:20; 19:2. Cf. *Ibid.*, 179, n. 57.

¹¹Heb. 1:7 quotes the LXX of Ps. 103:4, except for changing πῦρ φλέγον (“burning fire”) to πῦρ φλόγα (“flame of fire”). Both the MT and LXX are ambiguous. Either God (1) “makes winds/spirits his angels/messengers” or (2) “makes his angels winds.” Ellingworth argues the LXX cannot have the second meaning (Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews. A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), 120). However, there is strong syntactical support for the translation “makes his angels winds.” In about 80% of Greek double accusatives, the object precedes the complement. Even more telling, when one noun has an article and the second does not, the noun with the article is normally the object. (Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 184-185).

an elementary “systematic theology” formed by integrating the teachings of several passages to form a new conclusion.

Citation 5 (v. 8-9 = Ps. 45:6-7): The Eternal Throne and Exaltation of the Son

This citation is a quotation of Ps. 45:6-7, which is another royal psalm that describes the king of Israel in idealized terms. The Psalm echoes and expands upon the promise in 2 Sam. 7:11-16, which was the original source of the concept of an eternal Davidic kingdom. Ps. 45 emphasizes that the king will be blessed by God forever (v. 2) and he will reign with an eternal kingdom (v. 6). Since the Davidic king was to be established by God as his righteous representative, the dramatic language of the psalm speaks of God acting through the king (v. 6).

The author of Hebrews sees this psalm as a reference to Jesus (v. 7, “about the Son he says”). As in Ps. 2, there are indications in the psalm itself that suggest that it refers to more than the succession of kings of Israel. The description of the king of Israel is idealized and the characteristics are too grand to be fulfilled by any human king: His throne would last forever (Ps. 45:2; cf. v. 6); he would be “more excellent” than other men (v. 2); he would be supremely majestic (v. 3); his actions would be completely true, meek, righteous and just (v. 3-4, 6-7); he would conquer all his enemies (v. 5); he would be exalted above other kings of the earth (v. 7).¹² Since the Messiah was to be the Davidic king *par excellence*, all that the Psalm said about the Davidic king would apply to Jesus. All of the human kings of Israel who only fulfilled these expectations in limited ways served as types of the great eschatological Davidic king, the Messiah. The reference to the anointing of the king by God (Ps. 45:7) fits naturally with the concept of the Messiah as God’s supreme “anointed one.”

How does the author move from a messianic understanding of this royal psalm to the concept that the Messiah is God? (1) On the simplest level, the author is exploring implications of his assumption that Jesus is God. His logic is that the psalm refers to the throne of God (v. 8) and since he has already shown that Jesus is God, the teachings of the passage about God can be applied to Jesus.¹³

(2) More importantly, the psalm has an intriguing ambivalence about God: It addresses God (Ps. 45:6, “your throne, O God”). Yet it refers to another figure that “God” can call “God” (v. 7, “God, your God, has set you above your companions”). This “God-God duality” was highly suggestive to the author of Hebrews who clearly viewed Jesus as God (Heb. 1:2-3). A similar duality is found in Ps. 110:1 (“the Lord said to my Lord”), a messianic psalm cited in Heb. 1:13. Jesus himself interpreted this duality in Ps. 110 as a reference to himself (Mk. 12:36 par). Perhaps the author of Hebrews reasoned that if it was valid for Jesus to interpret the duality relationship in Ps. 110 as a reference to himself, then the similar duality in Ps. 45 could also be applied to Jesus.

This duality is suggestive of the father/son relationship in Ps. 2:7 and 2 Sam. 7:14. Both figures may legitimately be addressed as God. Yet the duality also involves a type of subordination, since “God” anointed this second figure called “God”. This fits the terminology of “Son” that Hebrews uses and it explains why he introduces the passage, “concerning the Son he says.” Even though the OT does not explain this unique relationship, it becomes clearer in light of the further revelation of the divine nature of Jesus in the NT.

In contrast to the description of angels in the previous citation, this passage highlights the uniqueness of Jesus and shows how worthy he is of worship: The angels are servants, but the Son is an eternal king. The angels are mutable, but the Son has an eternal kingdom. The angels are created beings, but the Son is God. The Son is exalted above not only other kings but even angels, which is reasonable if the Son is indeed God.

¹²F. Delitzch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, ed. C. F. Keil and F. Delitzch, trans. James Martin, vol. 5, *Psalms* (1871; reprint, Grand Rapids, Mi.: Eerdmans, 1973), 2:84. It also could indicate his superiority over other people, i.e. the Jews in the original context. Simon Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1984), 44, sees it as Christians.

¹³Ellingworth, 41, says that since the author assumes Christ was active throughout OT history, this passage may be understood to refer to Christ.

Citation 6 (v. 10-12 = Ps. 102:25-27): The Eternal, Unchangeable Nature of God, the Creator

This extended quotation from Ps. 102:25-27 praises God for a variety of his attributes and works: (1) The Lord is the *creator* of both heavens and earth (v. 10), which is undoubtedly a merism for all things. (2) The Lord is *eternal* (v. 12, “your years will never end”, τὰ ἔτη σου οὐκ ἐκλείψουσιν), in contrast to heaven and earth, which “will perish” (v. 11, αὐτοὶ ἀπολοῦνται) and will “wear out like a garment” (v. 11, πάντες ὡς ἱμάτιον παλαιωθήσονται). (3) The Lord is *unchangeable* (v. 12, “you will remain the same”), in contrast to the created order, which one day God will change (v. 12, πάντες ὡς ἱμάτιον παλαιωθήσονται) and “roll up like a robe” (v. 12, ὡσεὶ περιβόλαιον ἐλίξεις αὐτούς).

This citation is related to the previous one by keyword linking with the address “O Lord” that begins this citation in the LXX (v. 10) and “O God” which begins the previous citation (v. 8).¹⁴ However, the connection is conceptual as well, since both are prayers of praise to God for his works and divine attributes, and both refer to the eternity of God (v. 8, his eternal throne, and vv. 11-12, his eternal and unchanging nature).

The introductory formula for this passage is a simple “and” (καί), which suggests that the introduction of the previous citation applies to this passage as well: This passage is also “about the Son” (v. 8, πρὸς τὸν υἱόν).¹⁵

In what sense, then, is it appropriate to apply this passage to Jesus? The author of Hebrews is not using this passage to *prove* the deity of Christ. Rather he is using it to teach some *implications* about the person of Christ in light of his deity, which he has already established. The purpose of this citation, therefore, is not apologetic, but theological. Once it is accepted that Jesus is God, then any passage that refers to attributes of God can be used to learn more about Jesus. Since Jesus is God, this passage shows that he is *creator* of all things, in contrast to the angels, which he created. He is *eternal*, in contrast to all created things which will pass away. He is *unchangeable*, in contrast to the changeable creation, which he will fundamentally transform at the end of the age.

The juxtaposition of this passage with the other passages in this catena reinforces the supremacy of Christ, in contrast to the angels. It is yet another reason to worship the Son, not angels. Although the OT passage did not teach this, it is a valid *application* of its teachings about the nature of God to a new situation in which angels are being venerated higher than God the Son.

Citation 7 (v. 13 = Ps. 110:1): The Son Sits at God’s Right Hand

This citation from Ps. 110:1 is from another royal psalm with idealized language about the Israelite king. The king rules with the authority of God himself as God’s vice-gerent on earth.¹⁶ As in Ps. 2 and 45, the image of the king is too large for to be fulfilled by any human Israelite king: He sits at God’s right hand in a position of great authority, power and honor (v. 1). He has conquered all opposing nations (v. 1) and he rules and judges all the nations of the world from Zion (vv. 2, 5-6). He is not only a great king but also a priest (v. 4). His reign is eternal (v. 4).

As in Ps. 2 and 45, these grand claims hint at a messianic interpretation. The hopes and expectations of the Davidic kings were fulfilled typologically in the Messiah. The psalm was interpreted messianically in many branches of Judaism. David Hay shows that the messianic interpretation of the psalm was firmly entrenched in

¹⁴“Oh Lord” is not in the MT, but it is in the LXX. However, this address to God is used repeatedly in the Psalm, including in the first line, which indicates that it is appropriate to see this as a continued prayer of praise to God.

¹⁵“Lord” (κύριε) in the opening line is generally used in Hebrews to refer to God (7:21; 8:2, 8, 9, 10, 11; 10:16, 30; 12:5, 6, 14?; 13:6?), although rarely does it refer to Jesus (2:3; 7:14; 13:20). In this passage, it is clearly a reference to God.

¹⁶David M. Hay, *Glory At the Right Hand: Psalm 110 in Early Christianity* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1973), 20. The Israelite king was placed on the throne by God and was to rule for the Lord. Cf. 1 Chr. 17:14; 28:5; 29:23; 2 Chr. 9:8; 13:8

Rabbinic literature of the third century.¹⁷ The fact that this Jewish interpretation was commonplace despite the Christian claim that the psalm shows the messiahship and deity of Jesus suggests that this was a well established traditional view by this time. In the pre-Christian era, the Hasmonean rulers used the concept of the Melchizedek priesthood to support their role as priest-kings, with messianic overtones.¹⁸ There may also be allusions in the Similitudes of Enoch, although it unknown whether this is pre-Christian.¹⁹ Although it is not proven that Ps. 110 was interpreted in a messianic way prior to the NT, there is a high likelihood that it was in some Jewish circles.

Mk. 12:35-36 suggests the existence of a messianic understanding of Ps. 110 in the first century. Jesus says that the scribes claim that the Messiah would be the son of David. Then he quotes Ps. 110:1 and asks how David can address this person as “Lord” and still be a son of David. He agrees with the popular conception that the Messiah would be the son of David and then builds on the “Lord-Lord” duality of this passage to point to the deity of the Messiah, and therefore his own deity.

It is likely that the messianic use of Ps. 110 in Hebrews stems from this tradition of Jesus’ own teachings. The psalm begins with a “Lord-Lord” duality (“the Lord said to my Lord”) that is similar to Ps. 2 and Ps. 45. The interpretation of this as a reference to the divine nature of Jesus may well originate with Jesus himself. The psalm refers to a king who would be greater than any normal king in authority, righteousness, divine blessing, and the universal scope of his kingdom. The psalm also plants the seed of a “dual Lord” relationship of this person to God: “The Lord says to my Lord.” Although he would be “Lord,” he would address God as “Lord.” The full fruit of these concepts and their application to Jesus, however, came by revelation based on Jesus own teachings about himself.²⁰

It is surprising that the author of Hebrews omits the first line of the psalm “the Lord said to my Lord” (Mk. 12:35-37), since he uses passages with similar duality language twice in this chapter. This suggests that the psalm was well known to the readers, who would automatically think of the opening line when they heard the rest of the verse. In some ways the omission of a very familiar and expected expression may have a stronger impact than its inclusion. The author apparently expected the reader to make the connection.²¹

This psalm was quite pivotal in understanding the identity Jesus for the author of Hebrews. He later cites v. 4 concerning the priesthood like Melchizedek to establish Jesus’ role as a priest (Heb. 5:6, 10; 7:17, 21). He explicitly links Psalms 2 and 110 in 5:5-6 to show that Jesus is both the divine Son and the eternal priest.

The Structure of the Collection of Citations in vv. 4-13

The arrangement of these biblical citations is overlaid with several structural patterns. John P. Meier has shown that the selection of citations fits the general pattern of the Christological assertions in Heb. 1:2b-4.²² This is a helpful observation, although the fit is not perfect in that there is nothing about Christ’s work of offering purification for sins (v. 3c).

¹⁷Ibid., 27.

¹⁸1 Macc. 14:41 (Simon); As, Mos. 6:1 (priest kings); Jub. 32:1; T. Levi 8:3, 14-15 (Hasmoneans, possibly John Hyrcanus). Josephus says the Hasmoneans took on the name “priests of the Most High God” (Ant. 16.6.20); cf. b Rosh Hashanah 18b. This is used in the OT only in Gen. 14:18-20 in connection with Melchizedek.

¹⁹1 En. 45:1, 3; 51:3; 52:1-7; 55:4; 61:8; 69:27, 29. Hay, 26.

²⁰Peter also used the psalm in Acts 2:34-35 to show both the Messiahship and the Lordship of Christ, an interpretation also is likely based on Jesus’ teaching.

²¹Longenecker and others have suggested that this is evidence that this chapter uses a pre-existing collection of passages perhaps from a well known early Christian testimony collection (Longenecker, *Biblical*, 179).

²²John P. Meier, “Symmetry and Theology in the Old Testament Citations of Heb 1,5-14,” *Biblica* 66 (1985): 504-33.

Another pattern is that the catena begins and ends with two royal psalms (Ps 2, 110). These state the assumptions upon which all else is built; i.e., that Jesus is the Son, the Lord and that he therefore fulfills the messianic hopes in these royal psalms. These two psalms create a structural inclusion that sets the theme of the divine Sonship and messianic identity of Jesus.

The series of OT quotations alternates between two types of passages: (1) Passages that describe a duality relationship between the messianic figure and God; and (2) passages that explore the implications of the deity of Christ as expressed in the duality passages.

(1) The majority of passages have some type of duality relationship between the messianic figure and God: (a) Citations 1 and 2 (v. 5a-b) refer to a “father/son” relationship with God. (b) Citation 4 (vv. 8-9) has a “God-God” relationship, where “God” addresses another person as “God.” (c) Citation 7 (v. 13) has a “Lord-Lord” relationship (Ps. 110:1a, “the Lord said to my Lord”), although that opening line is omitted in Heb. 1:13. These passages support the deity of Christ when this duality relationship with God is interpreted Christologically. Thus even though the OT does not explicitly refer to more than one person in the godhead, these passages fit this interpretation when viewed in light of the NT revelation of the divine nature of Jesus.

(2) The second type of passage explores implications of the deity of Christ suggested in the duality passages. The assumption is that if Jesus is God, then anything true of God is also true of Jesus and passages that refer to God can be used in reference to Jesus. (a) Citations 3 and 4 (vv. 6-7) show that one should only worship God and not worship angels, since even angels worship God and angels are changeable, unlike the unchangeable God described in vv. 8-12. (b) Citation 6 describes the eternal existence and uncreated nature of God and by inference applies these divine attributes to Jesus. These “implications of deity” passages do not *prove* the deity of Christ, but they teach about the nature of Jesus once his deity is accepted. These passages do not function apologetically but didactically.

Thus there is a structural interchange between the dual Lord passages and the nature of deity passages. The dual Lord passages support the claim that Jesus is Messiah and God, while the other passages explore implications of this divine nature of Jesus. Table 2 shows the interchange between these two types of passages.

Table 2: Two Types of OT Citations

#	Hebrews	OT Passage	Type of Passage:	
			Duality Relationship	Implication of Deity
1	5a	Ps. 2:7	Father/Son	
2	5b	2 Sam. 7:14	Father/Son	
3	6	Ps. 97:7 or Deut 32:43 LXX		worship the Son, since angels worship God
4	7	Ps. 104:4		do not worship angels, since they are changeable, created beings
5	8-9	Ps. 45:6-7	“God your God”	
6	10-12	Ps 102:25-27		since Jesus is God, he is creator, eternal, unchangeable
7	13	Ps. 110:1	“The Lord said to my Lord”	

The Interpretive Methods Used in Hebrews 1

The author of Hebrews 1 used a variety of sophisticated interpretive techniques with these seven biblical passages:

1. **The passages are linked by key words.** The arrangement of passages is grouped according to keywords, such as the father and son word pair in citations 1 and 2, the reference to angels in citations 3 and 4 and

the address “O God” (v. 8) and “O Lord” (v. 10) that begins citations 5 and 6 and is assumed in citation 7. However, this is not simply a loose arrangement based on word association, as is sometimes found in rabbinic literature. In each case, there is a close organic conceptual link between the passages.

2. The interpretation assumes the original context. The author presupposes that his readers were familiar with these texts so that a reference to a few lines would bring to mind the entire passage. C. H. Dodd notes that this is typical of other testimony collections: “These sections were understood as *wholes*, and particular verses or sentences were quoted from them rather as pointers to the whole context than as constituting testimonies in and for themselves.”²³ For example, citation 3 (Ps. 97:7 or Deut 32:43 LXX) presupposes the original context which stressed worshiping the true God rather than false idols and angels. This heightens the significance of the part that is quoted, about angels worshiping God.²⁴

3. The author presupposes a straightforward literal interpretation consistent with the OT context and purpose. The interpretation of citation 4 (Ps. 104), for example, is consistent with the figures of speech used in the original poem. Citations 5 and 6 (Ps. 45, 102) are straightforward interpretations of the attributes and works of God. Even when the author extends a passage beyond the function of the original passage, he still builds on the plain historical meaning, but he draws inferences from other passages or revelational theological assumptions (e.g. when he applies the passages about God’s attributes and works to Jesus).

4. Corporate solidarity extends the characteristics of the Davidic kings to the Messiah. The royal psalms (2, 45, and 110) and 2 Sam. 7:14 describe concepts too great for any single king to fulfill: an eternal kingdom, a universal rule, and perfect righteousness. The Messiah, the greater son of David, sums up all these idealized expectations of the Davidic kings. This corporate solidarity concept was accepted by many branches of Judaism in the NT era.

5. The Davidic kings of Israel serve as types that point forward to Jesus. The pictures of the idealized Davidic kings set a pattern which was perfectly fulfilled in the Messiah (Psalms 2, 45, and 110 and 2 Sam. 7:14). Typological interpretation is different from allegory, since it is based on a view of history that says that God established patterns in persons, events and institutions that point forward to something that God will bring about in the eschatological age. It assumes both the historicity of the events and God’s supernatural control of history so the pattern is repeated in a more perfect way in the last days. Allegory, by contrast, assigns arbitrary meanings to aspects of a passage, which are not tightly linked to their literal meaning.²⁵

6. The OT is interpreted Christologically. The author reads the OT in light of the additional knowledge that has been revealed about Christ. He assumes the literal meaning of the passages, but he moves beyond that meaning to provide additional insights in light of the progress of salvation history due to the coming of the Messiah. Thus the corporate solidarity concept and the typological patterns find their perfect eschatological fulfillment in Jesus. Even though many of these passages (Ps. 2, 45, 110, 2 Sam 7:14) were capable of messianic interpretation in the NT era, it is a distinctively Christian interpretation that says that *Jesus* fulfills these passages. This is, of course, at the heart of Christian faith.

7. Passages that describe the characteristics of God are applied to Jesus. Since the author assumes that Jesus is God, any passages that refer to God also describe the works and attributes of the Son of God. These passages are not used to *prove* the deity of Christ but to explore some *implications* of his deity.

8. Logical inferences are drawn by integrating the teachings of several passages. The author juxtaposes passages and then draws conclusions by combining the teachings of the passages. The selection and

²³C. H. Dodd, *According to the Scriptures. The Substructure of New Testament Theology* (London: Nisbet, 1952), 126.

²⁴Citation 4 assumes the context of worshiping God who created angels and various aspects of nature. In citation 5, the idealized nature of the king suggests this is a picture of the messianic king. In citation 7, the first line is the key to the connection: “the lord said to my lord.”

²⁵E. Earle Ellis, *Paul's Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mi.: Baker, 1957), 165-9. Typology was also important in Second Temple Judaism. The idealized passages about the Davidic king and the eschatological overtones of the Song of Moses were often interpreted messianically

arrangement of passages leads the reader to the conclusion that the author wants the reader to see. The interpretation of individual passages may be straightforward and consistent with the OT context. However, the arrangement of passages leads to inferences that go beyond the intention of the original passages, but do not run counter to them. This method is similar to developing a systematic theology, by deriving conclusions from several passages. For example, a passage about the nature of angels as created and changeable beings (citation 4) in the context of passages on the unchangeable nature of Son/God (citations 5 and 6) implies that one should worship the Son/God rather than angels (v. 6, 8, 12). Although Ps. 104:4 did not originally teach this, it is a reasonable inference when combined with the teachings of other passages.²⁶

9. **Unstated logical syllogisms may be used to draw conclusions.** The interpretation in many of these passages involves an unstated logical syllogism. Since a step is sometimes omitted in the logical syllogism, it may falsely appear that the author is jumping to a conclusion.²⁷ Sometimes the missing step is an unstated theological assumption, which may also have been shared by the original readers. For example, the interpretation in vv. 10-12 is based on this syllogism:

Ps. 102 describes the attributes of God	
Jesus is God	[assumed]
∴ Therefore, Ps. 102 describes the attributes of Jesus	

In this example, the second term of the syllogism is an unstated assumption, which the author bases on prior revelation. He states this assumption in vv. 2-3, then he builds on it later.

10. **Some conclusions are unstated and must be inferred by the reader.** The author respects the intelligence of his readers and lets them draw the logical conclusions from the juxtaposition of passages. For example, if angels worship God, and Jesus is God, and only God is to be worshiped, then the implied conclusion is that we should not worship the angels but we should worship the Son (citations 3 and 4). The contrast between the temporary nature of angels and the permanent reign highlights the superiority of the Son (citations 4, 5 and 6).

11. **The author applies the teachings of the Scriptures to contemporary situations.** The author assumes the literal meaning of a cited passage, but does not always explain it. Then he explores the significance of the passage for the needs of his audience in ways that may differ from the application of the original passage. For example, the passage about angels worshipping God (citation 3) is used to show that God the Son should be worshiped, rather than angels, since the angels themselves worship God. This addresses the current need of the author's audience.

The Theological Assumptions of the Author

The interpretation of the OT passages in Hebrews is often based on unstated theological assumptions. Often these assumptions serve as a missing step in an implicit syllogism. In other cases they determine the interpretive method used to understand the OT passage. Some of these assumptions were accepted in certain branches of Judaism, so the interpretation made sense within this cultural context. The assumptions were also likely shared with the original readers so the author did not need to prove them. Although some of these assumptions are revelational and thus a matter of faith, they often originate with the teachings of Jesus about himself.

1. **The original readers were familiar with these OT passages.** This is shown by the fact that the

²⁶For example in citation 6 the inference is that since God the Son is creator, eternal and unchanging, these are additional reasons to worship the Son, not angels. Although the OT passage did not teach this, it is a valid application of its teachings about the nature of God to a new situation in which angels are being venerated higher than God, the Son.

²⁷Cf. Friedrich Schröger, *Der Verfasser des Hebräerbriefes als Schriftausleger*, Biblische Untersuchungen, no. 4 (Regensburg, Germany: Pustet, 1968); Ellingworth, 41. Schröger argues that interpretations that may appear to modern readers to be atomizing are really due to theological presuppositions that the author brings to the text.

argument depends on the original context. It is reflected by the omission of key phrases, such as the first line of Ps. 110 and the fact that the author often leaves unstated the logical conclusions of the passages.

2. **The Messiah would fulfill the idealized expectations of the Davidic king.** This was a widely held belief shared with many branches of Judaism. It may have been part of the “elementary teachings about the Christ” (6:1; cf. 5:12) that his readers already knew.²⁸

3. **The author is living in the last days.** He explicitly states this assumption in v. 2 (“in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son”). This enables him to see that the eschatological overtones of the Song of Moses and the idealized images of the Davidic king in the royal psalms are fulfilled in Jesus the Messiah. This view is based on an apocalyptic two age view of history similar to that found in Jewish apocalyptic writings. But unlike the Jewish writings, the author believes that salvation history has progressed and the work of the Messiah has been completed, so that the new age has come. This view was widely shared by other NT authors.²⁹

4. **Jesus is the Messiah.** This assumption pervades his Christological interpretation of virtually all the passages. It is likely that this belief was shared by his readers (cf. 6:1). He does not have to prove this, but he is exploring the implications of this for the supremacy of Christ over angels, whom his readers appear to venerate. Although it is a revelational assumption, it undoubtedly originated with Jesus’ own claims, based on his interpretation of Ps. 2 and 110 as a reference to himself.

5. **Jesus is God.** Many of these passages are used by the author not to prove the deity of Christ, but to explore some implications of this concept. He states this assumption in vv. 2-3. This is a revelational assumption that is probably based on Jesus’ own teachings (Mk. 12:36 par) and the voice from heaven at the baptism and transfiguration of Jesus. He uses many of the citations for theological rather than apologetic purposes.

Conclusions

The author of Hebrews respects the original meaning and assumes the context of the OT passages that he cites. He does not allegorize these passages, but he uses corporate solidarity and typology to interpret the OT Christologically in the light of the coming of the Messiah “in these last days” (v. 2). He also draws inferences from groups of passages and applies the passages to the contemporary needs of his audience.

The key to the author’s interpretive methods is the use of often unstated assumptions that guide his interpretations. He assumes that Jesus is the Messiah, that Jesus is God, and that he is living in the time of eschatological fulfillment. These concepts are based on Jesus’ own interpretations of key messianic passages. Given these revelational assumptions, which may have been shared by his original readers, his interpretation of these seven passages is coherent and consistent.

²⁸Longenecker, *Biblical*, 178.

²⁹Ellis, *Prophecy*, 164-5.